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WORDSWORTH'S USE OF MILTON'S DESCRIPTION
OF THE BUILDING OF PANDEMONIUM.

To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.

SIRS :—To what extent a figure in poetry may prevail in a writer's mind, and be reflected in his own work is strikingly exemplified in the case of Milton's description of the building of Pandemonium, and its reappearance in the poetry of Wordsworth. It is not surprising that so earnest a student and passionate a lover of Milton should have been influenced by this most exquisite of all descriptions. The "rising like an exhalation" is the line which seems to have laid the deepest hold upon Wordsworth's imagination. Could it have been that his own land, the country of the lakes, with its mists and drifting fogs, suggested a comparison with the picture of the palace rising like a mist?

Dorothy Wordsworth, in a letter to Mrs. Clarkson, dated from Elleray, November 12, 1810, tells of the power which the rising mists in the mountains had to suggest Milton to Wordsworth :

"The weather was heavenly when we were there," she writes, "and the first morning we sat in hot sunshine on a crag, twenty yards from the door, while William read part of the fifth book of *Paradise Lost* to us. He read *The Morning Hymn*, while a stream of white vapour, which coursed the valley of Brathay, ascended slowly and by degrees melted away. It seemed as if we never before felt deeply the power of the poet, 'Ye mists and exhalations, etc., etc.'"

Here, it seems, must be proof positive of Wordsworth's connecting the thought of Milton (*P. L.* v, 185 f.) with the mists of his own land. And as deeply as he loved the country around Roydal Mount, so must the power of Milton's description have appealed to him, and become an unconscious part of his poetry.

In reference to his faith Wordsworth writes to Sir George Beaumont, May 28, 1825 :

"I look abroad upon Nature, I think of the best part of our species, I lean upon my friends, and I meditate upon the Scriptures, especially the Gospel of St. John ; and my creed rises up of itself, with the ease of an exhalation, yet a fabric of adamant."

Surely a more beautiful use of the simile could hardly be found.

In the *Waggoner* (Canto iv) appears :

And the smoke and respiration
Rising like an exhalation,
Blend with the mist—a moving shroud
To form, an undissolving cloud ;
Which, with slant ray, the merry sun
Takes delight to play upon.

Which suggests, not only the passage at *P. L.* i, 710 f., but also the passage which Wordsworth read to Dorothy that morning, *P. L.* v, 185 f.

In the Ode, *Who rises on the banks of Seine?* from the Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty, we find Wordsworth dependent upon the idea of building by the power of music :

Whether, as bards have told in ancient song,
Built up by soft, seducing harmonies ;
Or prest together by the appetite,
And by the power of wrong.

In another Ode in the same series, *When the Soft Hand of Sleep*, he turns to the passage again, in a series of lines of rarest beauty through which the words of Milton gleam like jewels through a crystal goblet :

Anon before my sight a palace rose
Built of all precious substances,—so pure
And exquisite, that sleep alone bestows
Ability like splendour to endure :
Entered with streaming thousands, through the gate,
I saw the banquet spread beneath a Dome of state
A lofty Dome that dared to emulate
The heaven of sable night
With starry lustre ; yet had power to throw
Solemn effulgence, clear as solar light,
Upon a princely company below,
While the vault rang with choral harmony,
Like some Nymph-haunted grot beneath the roaring sea.

The "streaming thousands" is undoubtedly a recollection of Milton's description of the lost spirits trooping into the newly built Pandemonium,

With hundreds and with thousands trooping came.

The beauty and proportion of a perfect building, rather than its rising to music or like a mist, appeals to Wordsworth in the Ode, *Imagination—ne'er before content*. The highest praise he can bestow upon a proposed temple is :—

Bright be the Fabric, as a star
 Fresh risen and beautiful within !—there meet
 Dependence and infinite proportion just ;
 A Pile that Grace approves, and Time can trust
 With his most sacred wealth, heroic dust.

In *The Excursion*, fifth book, the lines

For, from this pregnant spot of ground, such thoughts
 Rise to the notice of a serious mind
 By natural exhalation.

suggest the rising of the building, naturally as an exhalation from the ground.

Wordsworth's use of this Miltonic figure with its accompanying similes may have been unintentional ; it undoubtedly was. The fact that it reappears so often and in so diverse a manner is but another proof of his admiration of and dependence upon Milton.

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THEORIES OF VISION IN ENGLISH POETRY.

To the Editors of *Mod. Lang. Notes*.

SIRS :—Certain passages in our early poetry imply obsolete and primitive theories of vision, seriously stated by the Greek philosophers. I have collected the following to which I should be glad to add.

Spenser, *Faerie Queen*, 2, 11. 26, 1-2 :

For as the winged wind his Tigre fled,
 That view of eye could scarce him overtake.

Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, 581-585 :

But God who caus'd a fountain at thy prayer
 From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
 After the brunt of battle, can as easy
 Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
 Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast.

Dryden, *The Hind and the Panther*, Part II, 74-76 :

Because philosophers may disagree
 If sight by emission or reception be,
 Shall it be thence inferred I do not see?

An admirable account of Greek theories of sense-perception, up to and including Aristotle is *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition from Alcmaeon to Aristotle*, by John I. Beare, M. A., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1906. To this work my

attention is called by my friend Professor H. N. Gardiner. From it I draw a few hints in explanation of the above passages.

According to Theophrastus, Alcmaeon of Crotona held that the eye contains fire, as is evinced by the fact that a flash takes place within the eye when it receives a blow. (Beare, p. 11.) This would of itself perhaps sufficiently explain the passage of *Samson Agonistes*. But here we have also to reckon with the account of Milton's symptoms in his letter (No. 15) to Leonard Filaras : "I ought not to omit that while I had any sight left, as soon as I lay down on my bed and turned on either side, a flood of light used to gush from my closed eyelids." (*Milton's Prose Works*, edited by St. John, Bohn, vol. 3, p. 508.)

According to the Pythagorean theory, in sight a visual ray proceeds from the eye to the object of vision, reaching which it doubles back again to the eye, like a forearm outstretched and then bent back again to the shoulder (Beare, p. 12). A somewhat similar theory is stated in the *Timaeus* of Plato (Beare, p. 44) to the effect that light issuing from the eye, is compacted with the surrounding daylight into a homogeneous whole, which when it collides with anything in the line of vision causes the sensation of sight. Both the Pythagoreans and Plato seem to give Dryden's sight "by emission," a theory which clearly underlies also the passage from Spenser.

Dryden's sight "by reception" corresponds to several Greek theories. Thus Empedocles taught that emanations from the object perceived entered the perceptive organ by certain pores (Beare, p. 14). Further "Democritus asserts that seeing is the reception of an image reflected from the object seen." (*Alexander ad Aristotelem*, in Beare, p. 30).

Whether the direct source of the theory for any of the above passages of English poetry, may not have been a later Greek writer than Aristotle, I have not inquired. And I doubt whether even Dryden had in mind any of the theories of the science of his own day.

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